

The INQUIRER

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I-Thou Valuing relationships



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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
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Inquiring Words

The Eternal Light

For most of us, sometimes,
There are glimpses of what lies beyond;
But the vision fades,
As the headland is blotted out in the evening mist.
Will tomorrow dawn fair?
Or will the clouds persist from day to day?
Like the wise virgins, we must trim the lamps
of our perception
And be in readiness for when the day shines fair.
And, if our fortune holds, the vision
Once grasped, once comprehended in all its power,
May abide with us,
Guiding us so that we know
Though for the instant we see not.
And now, in the darkness of midwinter,
More than ever we need that light,
Whether the real light or our recollected vision of it.
We never can know for certain when it will come;
All we can pray is to husband it wisely at its coming.

– Dr Martin Pulbrook
7 December 2008

Come great-hearts, come dreamers

In a recent issue of the Times Higher Education magazine there is a generous tribute to a University founded by American Universalists, Tufts, near to Boston. The tribute is from Felipe Fernández-Armesto as he leaves his post of Professor of History and settles in London.

"Tufts is a religious foundation, if you count Unitarian Universalists as religious. No formal link with the Church survives. Uniquely among non-Catholic institutions in the US, Tufts has a Catholic university chaplain. There is a big cohort of Jewish students. One of the most recent additions to the campus is a multifaith centre.

Paradoxically, in this determined pluralism, the universalist ethos survives. The university's distinct profile is as a place where students are encouraged to think globally."

Later in the article he describes how on United Nations Day they take down the Stars and Stripes and raise the flag of the UN, although many American jingoists are scandalised by that action.

It was a joy to read Felipe's article at Christmas time when I have often used the words of a Tufts Universalist minister Max Kapp.

"Come then apostles, come great-hearts, come dreamers and singers and poets, come builders, come healers, come those of the soil and those who command the might of machines, carry the Sacred Flame to make light the windows of the world.

It is we who must be keepers of the flame.

It is we who must carry the imperishable fire.

It is our watch now.

The spirit of the Universalists lives on in Tufts and, to read more, do take a look at the web pages and at the policy for using the University's Goddard Chapel; the policy is pure Unitarian Universalism.

– Peter Hewis

I-Thou relationships challenge us

The hardest task we face is to be in relationship with all we encounter says **Bill Darlison**.

'It is well to remember that the entire universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others.'

— John Andrew Holmes

These words of John Andrew Holmes' really made me sit up and think when I saw them for the first time. The 'trifling exception' he refers to, is, of course, 'I'; all the rest of the universe — planets, continents, seas, animals, forests, and the 6 billion people I share the earth with, constitute the 'other'.

On the one hand there's me, and on the other there's everything else that is not me. In addition to presenting me with a sobering evaluation of my apparent lack of importance in the whole scheme of things, Holmes' words also provoke what is probably the most significant religious question of all, indeed, probably the most pressing human question of all: how do I, this 'trifling exception', relate to 'the other'? In a sense, all morality, all ethics, can be reduced to this question.

This question haunted the Jewish theologian Martin Buber, prompted him to write his classic work *I-Thou*. It first appeared in German in 1923, and was later translated into English, becoming one of the seminal religious books of the 20th century. It's not an easy read, so I'm not recommending that you go out and buy it. But the central idea of the book can be put very simply: I relate to 'the other' either as an 'it' or as a 'thou', either as an object to be used, or as a subject with whom I can enter into relationship.

Buber deals principally with relations among human beings, but his idea can be extended to incorporate virtually every aspect of experience. What, for instance, is my relationship with God? Is God to me simply a convenient idea, a stop-gap notion which will suffice until some other explanation of things is available? Is God to me a mysterious but impersonal power upon which I can call when adverse circumstances demand, but which I can ignore during more tranquil times? If so, then God to me is an 'it', in absolute contrast to the Biblical tradition which speaks of 'the living God', 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob', a God who enters into relationship, who calls me by my name, who, in the words of the Psalmist, 'knit me together in my mother's womb', and who, according to the Gospels, numbers even the hairs on my head, the God whom Jesus calls 'Abba', a Hebrew word which is best translated not even as 'Father', but as 'Daddy'.

I can also hold up to scrutiny my attitude to the earth. Do I see it as an inert mix of rock, soil, and water, which exists for me to exploit for my own selfish purposes, or should I approach the earth, as people of more primitive societies have approached it, as a living entity which graciously cooperates with me to provide my physical needs, and which therefore should be treated with respect and love? Is the earth, from which my physical body springs, my 'mother', as the Native Americans would say, and therefore not an 'it' to be used but a 'thou' to be cherished?

It is, however, in my attitude to my fellow human beings that the 'I-It' or 'I-Thou' attitude is most pertinent to my daily



Martin Buber, in the white jacket, instructing his students.

life. There can be no doubt that my natural tendency is to view other humans as objects, and this is the fundamental reason why there is crime, war, violence and mayhem. In order to injure or kill human beings I have first to objectify them, to see them as 'other', as alive, perhaps, but in a different way from the way that I am alive. Part of this process of objectification is classification, lumping people together in categories so that we can spare ourselves the burden of actually encountering them as individuals. Queers, Prods, Lesbos, Yids, towel-heads, are easy to abuse, ridicule, and even kill: it's much harder to do the same to John, Mary, Peter, or Jane, individuals with a name, a history, relatives, careers, aspirations.

In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque describes an encounter between a German soldier and the body of a British soldier he has just stabbed.

Comrade, I did not want to kill you ... But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth an appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are just poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying, and the same agony — forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy? If we threw away those rifles and this uniform you could be my brother ... Take 20 years of my life, comrade, and stand up — take more, for I do not know what I can even attempt to do with it now. (Peace Prayers, page 32)

It's unlikely that anyone of us will have the kind of experience described by Erich Maria Remarque. But the principle of objectification holds good even in the less dramatic circumstances of our own lives. How often do we perceive other people as *functions*, limiting our appreciation of them to the purely superficial service they provide for us? Here are two examples to which I am sure we can all relate. The first is by Rabbi Harold Kushner.

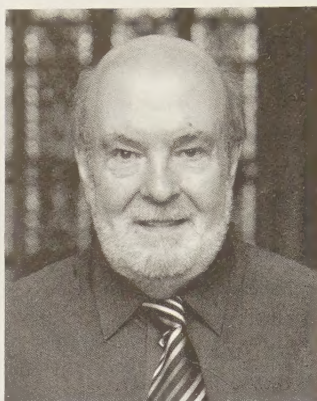
Many years ago, in an 11th-grade English class, I read a
(Continued on next page)

Are others people or functions?

(Continued from previous page)

short story about the wife of a British colonel in India who was expecting important guests for tea one afternoon. She looked out from her front porch after lunch and was horrified to see that the man who swept the leaves off her stairs every morning had not shown up for work. When he finally arrived, she tore into him. 'Don't you realise what you've done to me? Do you know who is coming here in an hour? I ought to fire you and see to it that you never get another job anywhere in this city!' Without looking up, the man quietly said, 'I'm sorry. My little girl died during the night, and we had to bury her today.' Bill Darlison

For the first time, the colonel's wife was made to see this man not simply as a device for getting her stairs swept but as a human being with a world of needs, pain, relationships to which she had never given thought. Suddenly, he had become a subject, a 'thou', a possessor of feelings, rather than an object.



(Rabbi Harold Kushner, *Who Needs God*, pages 96-7)

The second is a true story, written by Joanne C. Jones.

During my second month of nursing school, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions, until I read the last one: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?" Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50s, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade. "Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say 'Hello'."

I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy.

('Inspiration Peak' – Internet)

I watched an episode of *The Apprentice* during its last season on BBC 1. One of the contestants aiming to become Sir Alan Sugar's apprentice was a young man called Kevin who was desperate to impress Sir Alan, his fellow contestants, and the viewers with his business acumen and his ruthless attitudes. He told us: 'I owned my first house at 20, my second house at 23, and a Porsche at 24. I aim to become Britain's most successful and richest businessman and I don't mind who or what I have to step on in order to achieve my ambitions.' His words amused me a little – after all, he's only young – but they dismayed me, too, because of what they imply about the kind of society we live in. Why did he feel it acceptable, necessary even, to tell us how callous he is? He would probably be ashamed to admit to his secret sexual fantasies, or his unsavoury personal habits, but he has no shame whatsoever about telling millions of viewers how unconcerned he is about the feelings of others. He was announcing it with pride.

It may be just because I'm getting older, but I am becoming aware of a growing tendency towards impersonal encounter. It's significant that to airlines and rail companies we are no longer 'passengers' but 'customers'; to utility companies we are 'consumers'; and banks and building societies now sell 'products' they don't offer services. Emphasising the purely

commercial nature of these transactions serves further to erode the personal, relational element they used to carry. As my wife Morag and I were walking towards the church one evening we noticed that nearly everyone we passed was either using a phone – to text or to call – or listening to an MP3 player. Two people were even telephoning as they were riding their bikes! It certainly seemed as if the majority were engaged either in a solitary activity which excluded the people around them, or were relaying messages to people at a distance, all the while ignoring those who were close by. I frequently encounter young men and women on the stairs of my apartment building who find it almost impos-

sible to respond to a 'Good morning' or a 'Hello', and I am horrified to see – as I frequently do see – people in shops and supermarkets carrying on inane telephone conversations while totally ignoring the person who is attending to them.

These are trivial examples, but they are symptomatic of what the philosophers call 'solipsism', the tendency to close in on the self and ignore 'the other'. Autism is a particularly difficult manifestation of this, but while most of us mercifully escape such an extreme and debilitating condition, we are all somewhere on the spectrum. We all have a natural predisposition towards the 'I-It' mode of being, towards depersonalising and objectifying 'the other'. The classic scriptural description of this prevailing human condition comes in the Gospel story of the blind man who is cured in two stages by Jesus. After rubbing the man's eyes with spittle, Jesus asks him, 'What can you see?' 'I can see people, but they look like walking trees,' replies the man. Jesus has to rub the man's eyes once more in order to cure him completely. This is our situation: as we look around, we see animated entities with limbs just like our own, but we don't really encounter them as thinking, breathing, loving, hurting, rejoicing selves; they are objects not subjects; each is an 'it' not a 'thou'.

We don't overcome this tendency simply by wishing it away. We genuinely need to make an effort, daily, hourly even, in our most casual encounters and in our intimate ones to be aware of 'the other' as a 'thou'. And there's more to this than mere politeness.

Each night before falling asleep we should review our various encounters in the light of this vital distinction between 'it' and 'thou'. Ask yourself:

Did I treat so-and-so as a person or as a function? Did I give my friend the same opportunity to talk to me as I assumed for myself in talking to her? Did I blame anyone today for doing something that I frequently do myself? Did I judge another because of the category I'd placed them in rather than as an individual with a name and a history?

Or, to ask the one question which sums up all the rest: Did I encounter walking trees today, or people?

Ask these questions, or maybe think of some for yourself, and answer them honestly. Learning to see 'the other' as a 'thou', not as an 'it' is the hardest task we humans face, and one of the most important functions of a religious community like our own is to help us to achieve it.

The Rev Bill Darlison is minister with the Dublin congregation.

Welcoming new ministers

A 'reet good do' at Bank St Chapel

By Jennifer Whitelaw

Having done part of his ministry training at Bank Street Chapel, Bolton, Stephen Lingwood is now installed as its 27th minister. At his induction on 15 November Unitarians from around the country and a few guests of other faiths welcomed Stephen, who graduated from Unitarian College Manchester in the summer, in a service of celebration conducted by the Rev Jane Barraclough, herself recently appointed to Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.

The chapel's director of music, Keith Bateson, played the organ with his typical verve, and the assembled voices joined enthusiastically in praise and prayer. Among the hymns was 'How can I keep from singing?', and there was a true sense of dedication and faith. Keith also gave an organ voluntary, 'Praeludium in D', written by his son, Michael, and a rousing postlude. The Rev Dr Ann Peart, Principal of Unitarian College Manchester, gave the charge to the congregation, and the Rev Simon Ramsay of Birmingham New Meeting the charge to the minister.

Joyce Ashworth, president of the General Assembly, presented the new minister to his congregation, and the Bank Street president, Christine Leather, conducted the induction ceremony. She lit a candle from the chalice flame, and passed the light to Stephen as a symbol of the joy and responsibility of his ministry, and he, in turn, passed it to the congregation. When everyone's candle was lit, all joined in singing 'Spirit of Life'.

Stephen, young and radical, symbolises hope for the future of Unitarianism. He has already written a book – 'The Unitarian Life: Voices from the Past and Present', published in



(l-r) The Rev Jane Barraclough, GA President Joyce Ashworth, the Rev Dr Ann Peart, Stephen Lingwood and the Rev Simon Ramsay celebrated Stephen's induction.

March. He has embraced the challenges of a town centre ministry, joining in the efforts to offer safety and solace to young people there. His services are illuminating chapel members, and he is not afraid to don his pinny and help with the weekly brunch.

So, it was with great enthusiasm that the congregation of this historic chapel, which has been the spiritual home of many of Bolton's leading men and women, welcomed their new minister and joined him as he builds on the past to move forward into a bright future. After the service, guests were treated to a 'reet good do' as chapel members provided a delicious tea, and an opportunity for people to renew old acquaintance and form new friendships.

Prominent guests attended Dean Row

By Chrissie Wilkie

Dean Row and Hale Unitarian Chapels held a Service of Induction to welcome their new minister, the Rev Dr Vernon Marshall on Saturday 22 November. The service was held at Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow and was attended by the congregations of Dean Row and Hale with many distinguished guests and well-wishers from around the country.

The Rev Charles VanDenBroeder, from Monton, presided over the service, the Rev Steve Dick, the Chief Executive of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches gave the Charge to the Congregation and The Rev Chris Goacher from the East Midlands Partnership gave the Charge to the Minister.

The right hand of Fellowship and Greetings were given by Tony Cupper, group chairman, Helen Wilson, chairperson of Hale Chapel and Mike Cuerden, secretary of Dean Row Chapel. The Rev Pat Shaw read the Prayer of Installation.

Among the other distinguished guests who took part in the service were Joyce Ashworth, president of the General Assembly, Marian Nuttall, president of the Manchester District Association, Sheila Jones, president of the Provincial Assembly and the Rev Brenda Catherall, president of the Ministerial Fellowship, who all brought greetings.

Other prominent guests were Martine Marshall and Laura



(l-r back) The Rev Chris Goacher, the Rev Dr Vernon Marshall, the Rev Charles VanDenBroeder and (front) the Rev Steve Dick and Joyce Ashworth celebrated Vernon's induction.

Marshall, the Revs Celia and John Midgley, the Rev Jane Barraclough, the Rev Ann Peart, the Rev Michael and Julia Dadson and the Rev. Kirsty Thorpe, who represented Churches Together in Wilmslow.

Sharpe Scholar returns to a

The following is a report written by the Rev Csaba Todor who was the Sharpe Scholar at Unitarian College, Manchester, from September 2007 to July 2008. This report has been written as part of a thank you to all those individuals, Churches, Chapels and Associations who gave so generously to the fundraising appeal that we launched last year to help with the cost of hosting this family for one year whilst Csaba undertook studies at Unitarian College. The amount you so generously gave totalled £11,738.33, and some donations are still being received. On behalf of College, I ask that you please accept our grateful thanks too, not just for the money, but also for the generosity of spirit and heart so freely given to this wonderful family.

Liz Shaw, Administrator, Unitarian College, Manchester

By Csaba Todor

I am sitting at my desk in Homorodszentpál. The trees in front of the window are as green as they were a year ago, but I have not seen them since last September. Then I was sitting at another desk looking through another window, thinking about the mystery of a new year, which had just started, far away from my green home. My dreams were trying to answer the question whether it was a good idea to leave home for a second time, and, after another year of study go back to the same village again.

The trees and colours have awaited us, and it seems to me the same autumn would come back this year to meet us here in the garden. There is something in the home which waits, stays in the same place. And all those who decide to leave the home need to build another nest for new hope and life to grow. This is what we have done last year: – we made a nest in the autumn, a Transylvanian nest on Brighton Grove, in front of the main entrance of Luther King House, Manchester, on the ground floor, in Flat 3.

We arrived in Manchester on 6 September 2007, very early in the morning, after a long and exhausting journey. The journey is so long from Transylvania to Manchester – although the physical distance is not too bad. It goes back to 1860, when Domokos Simen arrived as the first Hungarian Unitarian Sharpe Scholar, starting to build a nest as the first bird. There were periods in history when this road became almost impracticable, and just a few could get over there.

The Rev Dr Ann Peart, the principal of Unitarian College, Manchester, met us at the Airport. As we arrived at our new home, it was obvious that others had worked on this flat to prepare the nest for our family. We ended up in a clean and very comfortable home which had been prepared for us. It depended on us what kind of spirit, colour and atmosphere we would be able to take inside these walls.

Next morning a gentleman, with a smiling face, came and knocked on the kitchen window: “Chaba?” he asked. I answered “yes” (“Jesz” in Hungarian). After introducing each other we realised that he was the Rev David Shaw, who was one of the nest-makers. We took Eszter to the Birchfield Primary School to register her in the first class. She was just 5, finishing her second year in her preschool at home. In Transylvania, children start their school at age 6 or 7, but this is the law here in Britain. She had no English at that stage. We were very anxious about her: what would happen?



Csaba, Eva and their daughter Eszter spent Christmas in Grindleford. They have since welcomed a new baby girl, Panna, to their family.

Then new faces started to come into our nest and life: Liz, Sheila, Dawn, Jeff, Geoff, and others. Our new home was built not of stone or red brick but of humans.

I had to choose what I was going to study in the first semester. I chose the *Core Module* (Introduction and Methodology in Contextual Theology), and the *Theologies of Mission*.

September and October were very nice and warm last year at the Platt Fields Park and Birchfield Park. The weather was so nice that if adults and children were not talking in English it would be confusing for us where exactly we were: Transylvania or Britain. Meantime Eva was trying her fortune to find a school where she could register for learning more English. Day by day our small nest became filled with lots of toys. They were offered for Eszter by different congregations to help her settle in. The whole flat became her empire, taking over even my desk, and sometimes the kitchen too. The weather changed to “normal” by November and we went to school, struggling with the impossibilities of English, so life became normal following its own path.

I preached in mid-November for the first time. I spoke about the importance of the life and work of Francis David. I had borrowed half my Principal’s library so I knew some of the writing and sermons of the Rev Bill Darlison and the Rev Cliff Reed. My spiritual life was built up by people I met, and people I have not.

rd's nest' in Transylvania

And we were walking a lot. I made a calculation and realised that the distance we walked in Manchester is equal to walking from Manchester to the western border of Hungary. The advantage of this was the discovery of some parts of the city: the shops, the galleries, the museums and libraries. New faces came into our life again: we received new invitations for preaching engagements with opportunities to go and know more people and more congregations around Manchester. We have not walked everywhere, of course. Sometimes we took the train or enjoyed a good person's help and ride. And as we walked and travelled, one day there was Christmas on our journey. Christmas held our hands and took us to Grindleford in Derbyshire, to another nest, another home, that of Liz and the Rev David Shaw. Then we spent the New Year with "big" Geoff, the Rev Geoff Usher, having a New Year's Eve party with people of the Fulwood congregation.

The end of January was taken up with the exams and assignments. I knew that I was given just one year to complete my MA, so there was no way to ask for extensions. My Principal, the Rev Dr Ann Peart, helped me a lot to clarify my confusions around the methodology in contextual theology. In mid-January Eva got "recruited" by Plymouth Grove Adults' School, where she had applied the previous October to get a place hoping to start her preparation for an English language exam. More and more congregations invited us to go and preach. I think I preached a total of 25 occasions.

On Sunday, the 13 January Emese Ballai came to Fulwood, and there we met our first Hungarian Transylvanian family, with whom we are in touch even now. New faces again in our life.

We started to talk about the similarities and differences in this global Europe, especially in regard to the British and Transylvanian context, although the method of contextual theology has not become one of my strengths.

Artists and Theologians in Dialogue and Ministry in Feminist Perspectives were the chosen modules in the second semester. I had not understood why it is not enough if I read the bibliography, making notes, then tell and write my opinion about a subject. I have to accept that those moments were the learning moments when I felt that this is the hardest period. The tutors, the Principal were at hand, open-minded and helpful people. Finally, I managed to finish my work in time, completing my final dissertation doing a research on the topic about the role of the Unitarian minister in the ritual of funerals. I found this very exciting, at least for me.

We travelled a lot, having enjoyed the warmth and hospitality of many English and Welsh families.

Eszter's English got acceptable enough to start her own conversations with British persons without asking us for permission and sometimes being silly. People were very polite with her and generous. They fulfilled her needs at the General Assembly's Meetings, in conferences, in family conversations. As sometimes happens with the stars, I think she did become a star. And we also think that she won many people for the cause of supporting the whole family, and not just the student, to travel from Transylvania and study in Manchester. I think she should get a preschool MA!

Eva took her language exam just before we left Manchester

in July, and I graduated too from the College. This was my third graduation from a theological institution, but it was really beautiful. It is a big event in the life of the College, but it was a big event in my life too.

And packing again in July. The hardest part was not what we need and should take with us back to Transylvania, but what to leave behind.

So, what is worth remembering?

- The royal parade we saw last October in London.
- The British Christmas.
- The football match at Old Trafford when Manchester United played with FC Barcelona in the Champion's League semi final. And the cricket game.
- The walk on the North Sea side.
- The castle of Caernarfon, and the weekend in Wales.
- The British grass, which I think is the greenest in the world. We stepped on it with respect and humbleness every time.
- And the weather: that if you see the hill, it means it will be raining soon, and if you do not see the hill, it means it is raining now!
- London and Liverpool.
- To sit on the left side of the car and not be driving it.
- And to drink lots and lots of tea....
(and much more).

Finally, we would like to thank the congregations, the ministers and lay leaders for the invitations and their hospitality.

Our special thanks go to Liz and Rev David Shaw who were as parents for us. And finally, but with very special thanks to the Rev Dr Ann Peart who was a teacher, a mother, a grandmother, a very strong but a caring person.

There is an empty nest on the chimney on top of our house here in Szentpal and I feel that there is an empty nest in our hearts too. We would like to hope that one day this empty nest will be filled with new hopes, new visits and old faces.

Best regards

Csaba, Eva and Eszter Todor

The Rev Csaba Todor was the 2007-08 Sharpe Scholar.



The Todor family's roof at home in Transylvania, with a bird's nest on the chimney.

Educational opportunities abound

Dawn Buckle shares good news about the Education and Training Commission

There is a new found optimism and enthusiasm sweeping through the Education and Training Commission (E+TC) as a result of two exciting happenings. First, chronologically, the exciting Elizabeth Tarbox RE Conference at which British Unitarian and North American Unitarian Universalist RE activists met together at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Hucklow in June, to exchange views and ways of working. Secondly, a very successful 24-hour meeting of members of the commission with representatives of all the panels associated with RE work. In addition, new people have recently joined the longer-standing members of the commission. They are Mary Wightman, Maggie Davies, the Rev Margaret Kirk, Jean Mason and Liz Shaw. All of whom are members of E+TC panels.

The commission holds the income from The Sunday School Fund and we really want this funding to be used for RE work in congregations and districts. So, if your congregation is starting or running a Sunday school, Junior Church or Sunday Club or is organising a specific one-off RE project, why not ask for funding from the commission? You will need to complete an application form which is available from me, details below. Making your request by email will help to speed the process. The Commission promises to respond in a short space of time. We are in the early stages of commissioning a new adult RE course 'Spirituality and Ageing'.

Almost all the panels have completed their action plans and these were received at the GA Executive Committee meeting in November 2008 with thanks.

At its meeting in November the commission held a few minutes' silence in memory of the Rev Simon John Barlow – a wonderful advocate of Religious Education, keynote speaker, workshop leader and member of the Hucklow Summer School planning group for many years. He will be greatly missed by all his friends in Unitarian Religious Education.

The Chalice Award Panel

Young Unitarian people at Urmston were awarded Gold and Bronze Awards; at Dukinfield, Walmsley and at Summer School Bronze Awards were achieved; Green Awards went to young people at Bradford and Dundee. A nine pack of new modules was added to the award and the whole of the award will have a new publicity poster, cover and introduction very soon.

The Engagement Support Panel

Two inspiring training courses for facilitators were held. A colourful and useful information leaflet was published. Panel members are focusing on 'intergenerational work' promoting 'Bright Lights' groups. The panel has a new member, Karen Hanley.

The Groups Working Well Panel

Panel members are leading a Group Facilitation Skills Course for ministers-in-training at Unitarian College Manchester from November 08 to March 09, along the lines of the much appreciated course held in 07.

The Hucklow Summer School Panel

Another transformational Summer School received splen-

did coverage in *The Inquirer* in October. The panel has a new member – Mel Prideaux – and is well on its way to planning next year's course.

The Joined-Up Education Panel

Two districts have successfully run the Worship Studies Courses (WSC) Foundation Step for lay people. Angela Maher, student on the Midland Union course

said, 'The course concentrated on the practicalities of taking the service – speaking up, dressing nicely, and being prompt... Aside from meeting people with a huge variety of Unitarian viewpoints, one of the best things was finding out about the various resources available for readings, poems and prayers.' A small number of students are continuing on the preliminary step of both the WSC and the Unitarian Studies Course. We are getting closer to what I once described as 'a carpet of trained Lay Worship Leaders across the country.' Two students who began on the WSC have been accepted for ministerial training this year.

The Religious Education Co-ordinators Panel

Two members of this panel are heavily committed along with John Harley, GA Youth Co-ordinator in planning 'REvolution', a course that aims to provide a trained RE facilitator in every congregation and district by 2011. The GA Executive Committee agreed that this project is to be supported with targeted funding from the GA Community Appeal. The appeal is promoted by the GA Funding Development Panel. To advertise REvolution, a Director of RE from the UUA, Pat Ellenwood – who has experience of the UUA Renaissance Course – will visit the UK to run RE workshops during the GA Annual Meetings 2010.

The Support for Organisational Leadership Panel (joint panel with Denominational Support Commission)

Substantial additions and corrections to the 'Help is at Hand' handbook were distributed recently to all congregations and districts along with a feed back sheet. The panel plans to have 'Help is at Hand' on the GA website soon. After this, the panel will stand back. They will monitor changes to relevant laws or new practice that make it necessary to make further updates to the information in the handbook, and will re-convene to make any changes, as and when necessary. They are willing to offer support to any district or group that is planning peer group support for congregational officers.

Dawn Buckle is chair of the Education and Training Commission of the Unitarian General Assembly.

For further information about the work of the Education and Training Commission email, ring or write to Dawn Buckle Chair of E+TC, Email: dfbuckle@yahoo.com, Tel: 01457 763 721, Address: 20 Wheatfield, Stalybridge, SK15 2TZ.



Dawn Buckle

Small Group Ministries thrive

By James Robinson

Unitarians gathered from 11 different congregations at the Essex Unitarian Church in London in November, to share success stories about their small group ministries. The workshop facilitator, the Rev James Robinson a member of the General Assembly Engagement Support Panel, opened the day by defining small group ministry as 'small groups whose intention it is to further the ministry of your Unitarian or Free Christian congregation'.

Participants reported on a remarkably diverse range of small groups, which included: poetry, meditation, chanting, Bible study, world religions, circle dancing, intergenerational gatherings, engagement groups, creativity, arts and crafts, social justice, outreach, study of the mystics, book discussion, the teachings of Jesus, drumming, singing, knitting, story telling, God in daily life, and more.

It was inspiring to hear how Unitarians are working through small groups to fulfil our spiritual and moral mission.

Four small group ministries were studied in more detail. We heard about Circle Dancing, held monthly at Golders Green Unitarian, facilitated by Rose Williams. Annette Percy, from Newington Green, spoke about their weekly evening of poetry, worship, and a common meal. The Rev Lindy Latham shared about the "Bright Lights" an intergenerational monthly gathering in Bristol, which has participants of all ages. Patricia Walker described a creativity group at Essex Church.

Following the description of these small group ministries

from 11 congregations, the workshop participants discussed what elements made small group ministries successful. It was agreed that all the groups had the following qualities in common:

- Committed leaders who had good people skills.
- A clarity of purpose or focus for the group.
- A sense of sacred space was created for each group.
- There were clear values about how people would treat one another – values which expressed our Unitarian way of being together.
- Personal sharing was encouraged in a safe atmosphere.
- Everyone in the group was valued and their talents, however humble, were encouraged.

Whatever the theme or content of the group described, a successful small-group ministry allowed the participants to reach for greater spiritual depths. In summarising the potential for such groups, James Robinson said: 'If there are 10 people in a group, with the average age being 50, that means the group has 500 years of experience. If that group is done well, it can draw on five centuries of human wisdom. But even deeper, if a group is done well, a wisdom emerges which seems to come directly from the Holy.'

In a closing circle, at the end of the workshop, participants expressed a sense of hopefulness that small groups could be one important way for our Unitarian movement to grow both in depth and in numbers.

The Rev James Robinson is minister at Rosslyn Hill.

Good practices for pastoral care

By Sue Woolley

Nineteen delegates from eight Midland Union (MU) congregations met at Kingswood Meeting House on 22 November to participate in a day-long training session on the basics of pastoral care. It was led by two MU ministers, the Rev Don Phillips of the Cotswold Group, and the Rev Ant. Howe of Kingswood and Warwick, to whom go our grateful thanks. The course was divided into four parts and some of the advice offered could be of use to Unitarians across the denomination.

Part one covered the basics of pastoral care, whether it is a home visit, or someone button-holing you before or after a service. Advice was given on basic approaches, and some good ideas were shared e.g. maintaining a birthday card list of congregation members, and sending each one a card from everyone else. The emphasis was on the community caring for the community.

Part two was on the art of listening. We were given tips on how to listen and how to respond, including examples of inappropriate responses; and then did a listening and recalling exercise, which was most enlightening.

Part three covered the limits of confidentiality and no-go areas. There were three key messages from this session:

- In the MU, it's possible to ring any minister in the district to ask for advice, or the MU district facilitator or treasurer – who can always be reached in an emergency. At Essex Hall, Peter Teets and the Rev Steve Dick are also available. That same advice is appropriate for Unitarians across the country who could consult with local ministers.

- The key question is: is this person a danger to themselves or others? If the answer to either of these is 'yes', then you are permitted to break confidentiality.

- There are limits to what you can cope with yourself. If what you are told involves abuse, a suicide threat, or some danger to others, one should involve the police or emergency services.

Part four of the programme covered particular issues concerned with the pastoral care of children and the bereaved. With children, there needs to be a balance between ensuring their safety and well-being, and not being vulnerable oneself. There is safety in numbers.

With an ageing population, bereavement is a common problem in any Unitarian community. The advice was simple: approach a bereaved person with sympathy and empathy. Grief is a long-term thing, and that special sensitivity will be required on anniversaries – of the death, on the deceased's birthday, and at Christmas.

The plenary session yielded the following good advice:

- Remember your own personal boundaries – there is a limit to your personal competence and the time you have available.
- If you take on the role of pastoral carer with a congregation, it is worth having in writing what your responsibilities and limits are.
- Providers of pastoral care need care themselves sometimes.
- The vast majority of people just want recognition, comfort and the belief that they matter.

Sue Woolley is District Facilitator for the Midland Union.

Letters to the Editor

Kingswood Chapel's 'secret' to success

As I have been a visitor during the last 13 years, I feel that being an outsider to the church gives me a chance to reply to the letter titled 'What is Kingswood's secret to success?'

(*Inquirer* 13 December). The sale of valuable land in the area brought in a considerable sum of money, but wealth doesn't always mean 'bums on seats'. The ministry at Kingswood is part-time and Warwick the other part.

A warm welcome always greets you, not just by the minister, but also the members of the congregation. They work together; the minister just doesn't minister to his congregation, but to the community.

It is obvious that Anthony's church services and preaching are what the people of Hollywood want. Anthony's article – also in the 13 December *Inquirer* – gives one an insight into his voice in the pulpit, as did his quotes in the profile of Kingswood published on 29 November.

They have a very talented and caring minister – long may their association go from strength to strength. I was very privileged to take part in his induction service, and to hear of his success in his first ministry is wonderful. Perhaps John Janssen, the letter writer asking about the success, could take a trip up the motorway system, leave at junction 3 on the M42 – and the end of his journey would be heart-warming.

Janet M Ford

Dukinfield

Worthing Fellowship founder would be pleased

To the Editor:

Whilst appreciating Jane Barton's letter in *The Inquirer* of 10 January, may I remind the Worthing Fellowship that they were originally started in the 1920s by my father, the Rev Harry Maguire who was, at that time, minister at Ditchling. When we first moved South from Barnet (founder members of the Enfield and Barnet Fellowship) in 1982, we went to a service at Worthing as I had memories of it as a child. They had just published an anniversary booklet on the history of the group which was started by my

father. They met in a room with a piano which was played for hymn singing by, (and I quote) "Mr Maguire's son", my brother Leonard, who many Unitarians will remember with much affection, along with the contribution he made to the denomination.

My Father took many services at other East Sussex churches such as Brighton, Billingshurst, Horsham, and even Chichester where I am now living. I remember as a small child going with him to Chichester as the chapel, now a listed building with many recent changes of use, was then the Girl Guides Hall and there was a baby doll for the guides to bath in order to get their baby care badges. That was the attraction for me.

The Worthing fellowship failed before the war for want of support, I cannot remember the exact date as, at that time, I was at Channing and away from home. But my Father would have been very pleased that it was re-started by Olive Poole, who was still very much to the fore in 1982 or thereabouts.

My memory for names is so bad but the member who rode his bicycle both for charity and for the annual visits to Sussex churches, used to call in here for comfort stops and coffee while on his rounds.

May I take this opportunity to wish Worthing every success in the future.

Betty Calderara

John Pounds, Portsmouth

Accept differences and peace will come

To the Editor:

I am a liberal and democratic person. I always have been in certain ways until recently, when I have become even more so. Why, because I believe we all have a right to be who we are or who we choose to be without intimidation, question or intrusion. We have a right to be a Unitarian, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu or to choose any other faith.

We have a right to be heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual and transgendered. We have a right to be of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and to all be treated as equals. We also have the right to end our lives, if we are finding life too painful and difficult. We have the right

to be physically disabled and to be treated as equally in society as our able bodied brothers and sisters.

Why do I believe in a liberal and free society for all?

Because I, personally, believe it is the pathway to peace and the bonding of all nations and all of humanity. If we could all acknowledge one another and work together accepting our differences, which are all very beautiful and unique and just concentrate on getting the job done, think of how the world would look.

This is what I believe my path is and what I feel that God is leading me to do right now. To bring people together and fight for a fair and just society where everyone is free to be who they are and to be who they want to be. The right to what makes them beautiful and special. You have the right to be who you are and you are loved just the same as your brother or sister next to you.

God's blessings and love and light to you all.

Christian Bateman

Cross Street Unitarian Chapel

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

UEW celebrates Golden Anniversary

By Margery MacKay

When the hosta flowers in my garden are in full bloom and the hypericum is a golden glow, I know it is time for me to pack my bags and head south to Unitarian Experience Week (UEW). You may have read in a previous edition of *The Inquirer* about the wonderful week we had last summer. What I want to tell you about though is how it all started and how we would like to celebrate our 50th Anniversary in 2009. This has been an unbroken annual event evolving from Family Holiday Conference to Unitarian Experience Week.

The 1959 brochure for the first conference explained that due to the persistent pressure from one enthusiast, the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire set up a committee whose plans were finally endorsed in 1958. The first Family Holiday Conference (FHC) entitled "Forward Together in 1959! A Dream Coming True?" took place in August 1959 at the Holiday Homes (now the Nightingale Centre), Great Hucklow. The brochure went on to say "Never before have British Unitarians had the opportunity of a full week's conference on things that matter most to our churches and the cause of liberal religion. We want all who come to experience for themselves the quickening pulse of our movement, to form links of personal friendship with those who are known to us now only by name, or not at all, and to give powerful momentum to the GA Forward Together Movement." Children had their own programme part of the time and at other times activities were en famille. This led someone to call the week "the thinking man's Butlins." This was ground-breaking stuff though. You may like to note that the cost of that first week was £7. The total cost for the week today, at around £300, is still reasonable for what you get. The members of the original committee were Humphrey Winder, the Rev Eric S Price, the Rev John Gill, Leslie Proctor, the Rev Joyce Hazlehurst, the Rev Fred Ryde, Mrs Fraser, the Rev. G. L. Clarke, and Martin Davies.

This original format continued until 1998, when the adult part of the conference became Unitarian Experience Week. This was partly because dedicated children's weeks and weekends had become more popular. While the movers and shakers in the movement may now attend Lay Leaders' Weeks, UEW aims to provide a middle-of-the-road programme for Unitarians and non-Unitarians alike, with a broad appeal and a wide range of subjects – not just religious ones. The week tries to meet the changing outlook and needs of people today and to offer them fun and fellowship and time to relax together as well. It is a good introduction to Unitarianism and Unitarians and we encourage newcomers to attend.

In 2009 our theme will be "Searching for Gold and Celebrating Golden Moments". During the week from 25 July to 1 August, we want to spend some time looking back but mostly looking for inspiration to enable us to take Unitarianism forward just as the first conference did. We may consider publishing any results.

Our thoughts on this so far have been that golden relates to gold, a colour of richness, a period of creativity and prosperity, times when people are at their best, things that endure and are of value, the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Alan Ruston will look at Golden Moments in Unitarian History and what they teach us today, and there may be additional workshops on this theme. Another session might consider the

Golden Essence/the Golden Thread running through all religions – or bringers of light or golden ages in other religions. Aled Jones will talk on Basic Biological Advances that have contributed to improving UK Health Care 1959-2009. We will also look at "Young Darwin". Not forgetting that "All that glitters is not gold", we hope to consider the downside of affluence and consumerism too. As usual there will be periods of spiritual uplift throughout the week, singing, music appreciation, walking, dance, golden art, meditation, poetry/prose readings for pleasure and free-time.

In addition to the above because of the 50th Anniversary we would like to have a "Golden Moments" session and a display during the 2009 week which could include comments, film, photos and other memorabilia e.g. "Hucklow Heralds". Sadly, most of the original founders are no longer with us but if you know anything about them or their families, or would like to include information in the display or send short comments for inclusion, or have any other suggestions regarding content for the week, please email margerymac@tiscali.co.uk or write to Margery MacKay, 21 Balmwell Grove, Edinburgh, EH16 6HG. The UEW website is now operational and once plans are finalised for 2009 the brochure and booking form will be placed on it for downloading. Watch out for developments at www.unitarianexperienceweek.org.uk.

Margery MacKay is honorary secretary of Unitarian Experience Week.



The Railway Day held by Padiham Unitarians is now a well-established annual event which draws ever increasing numbers of visitors, and exhibitors. The Gauge 1 society completely filled the Main Hall with their impressive layout, with many of the models powered by steam, generated from coal fired boilers! Other layouts included 'N', '00' and 16mm and a trade stand, which all added to the interest. The event was a huge social and financial success. The photo shows an 'N' gauge layout from Bradford Model Rail Club with their Secretary Kevin Jagger watched by Toby Brown, William Tomlinson, and Gavin Taylor.

Godalming Unitarians celebrate 225 years

By Adrienne Wilson

The 18th century Unitarian Chapel in Meadrow, Godalming was full on Sunday 23rd November for a special Anniversary Service. The congregation was celebrating the year 1783, when a small group of religious dissenters met in Eashing to found a chapel which would be more accessible to their community than those in Farnham and Worplesdon.

To capture some of the flavour of those far-off days, many of the congregation (which included a dozen children) dressed up in 18th century costume. Worship leader Sheena Gabriel had carefully chosen hymns and music of the period, with Haydn and Mozart performed on violin and keyboard by Nick Morrice and Adrienne Wilson in brocade, velvet and frills!

Terry Slade spoke of the early Sunday School, where no flogging was allowed. The children were interested to hear from 'Benjamin Franklin' (aka Dave Ruiz) about his invention of the lightning rod. Franklin had attended the first avowedly Unitarian congregation when it met in London in 1774 under



Adrienne Wilson and Nick Morrice played 18th century music, and dressed the part.

the Rev Theophilus Lindsey.

Jeff Teagle spoke of how Lindsey had left his Anglican living in Yorkshire when he was no longer able to accept the doctrine of the Trinity. Nowadays, of course, we Unitarians are less concerned with theological argument, and more with offering fellowship to those seeking a free and inquiring religion.

The occasion was honoured by the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of Godalming, Councillors Paul and Penny Rivers. During the service, the Mayor unveiled a new piece of art made by Nick Morrice: a mosaic of a flaming chalice, which has become the international symbol of Unitarians.

Coffee and conversation followed in the Unitarian Hall, featuring a 225th birthday cake baked by Louise Baumberg, where the children displayed their writing (done with quill pens under Paula Nottingham's guidance). Sue Teagle had prepared a photo display; Bill Hayhurst had photographed archive material, and both were much appreciated by members and visitors.

Adrienne Wilson is a member of the congregation at Meadrow.



The Mayor of Godalming, Councillor Paul Rivers unveiled a chalice mosaic made by Nick Morrice. Photo by Sue Teagle

Time to say 'Thank you'

Altrincham Unitarians have benefited from the services of loyal member Richard Kirkwood as their Buildings Warden for more years than anyone can remember. With four large Victorian buildings to look after, this is an important post. So, following a special Sunday worship service in November, the congregation laid on a surprise celebration in order to show their appreciation.

Richard has also given his buildings maintenance and development skills to nearby congregations, so representatives from Hale Chapel and Urmston came to add their thanks. In addition, for the Nightingale Centre Management Committee, he supervised the major redevelopment scheme that brought our beloved Great Hucklow Centre up to its present excellent condition. So Nightingale Management chairperson Marion Baker came to express the committee's appreciation, and GA President Joyce Ashworth sent a greeting. He is not retiring. He has been recruited onto the team overseeing the multi-million pound restoration of 84, Plymouth Grove, Manchester, the former magnificent home of novelist Elizabeth Gaskell and her husband the Rev William Gaskell.

To the sound of popping champagne corks and with a



decorated celebration cake to cut, Richard was presented with an illuminated address, expressing warm and sincere gratitude for more than 30 years of excellent work. Photo by Robert Roper